

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE****Exploring Challenges and Opportunities in Revitalizing Gadaa at Odaa Doggii<sup>1</sup>, Iluu Abbaa Boor Zone of Oromiyaa Regional State, Ethiopia**Lemessa Wakgari<sup>1</sup> and Dereje Fufa Bidu<sup>2\*</sup>

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**ABSTRACT**

This ethnographic research aims to explore problems and prospects in Iluu Gadaa revitalization. Interviews, focus group discussions, case studies and observations are employed to obtain the data from the society. Secondary data have also been added on these. These were analysed qualitatively in line with the societies' perspective as the science of ethnographic study permits. The data show Iluu Gadaa that had been weakened for more than 133 years is in the process of revitalization. In line with this, five Gadaa parties were established in 2015. However, the revitalization process is facing several challenges such as electing Gadaa leadership that overlooks Gadaa laws; the institution depends on government fund due to lack of budget; globalization and modernization, particularly dominant religions (Christian and Islam) are threatening; limited knowledge of the people about Gadaa system; and the aforementioned factors affect its originality. Contrarily, the reviving Iluu Gadaa contributed for inscription of Gadaa by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2016. This is because Iluu Gadaa is considered as active Gadaa among the western Oromoo groups. Thus, it is recommended that various stakeholders including government, NGO's and educational institutions need to support the revitalization process being undertaken; researchers need to engage in further investigations and documentation of the Gadaa practices. Moreover, the Iluu, especially the elected leaders, should practice more on Gadaa.

**Keywords:** Gadaa; Iluu Abbaa Boor; Odaa Doggii; Oromiyaa; Revitalization

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<sup>1</sup>Salgan Iluu Gadaa centre in Yaayyoo District of Iluu Abbaa Boor Zone of Oromiyaa State of Ethiopia. Afaan Oromoo orthography is used to indicate the origin; this is consistent for all Afaan Oromoo words throughout the article.

## INTRODUCTION

Gadaa system guides Oromoo social, political, economic, and religious life. In other words, it overrules all Oromoo institutions and aspects of life. Legesse (1973) has correctly identified three interrelated meanings of Gadaa: “*it is the grade during which a class of people assumes politico-ritual leadership, a period of eight years during which elected officials take power from the previous ones and the institution of Oromo society.*” Others focus on its originality and significance; Gadaa system is considered the basis of democratic and egalitarian political systems (Melbaa, 1988); it provides opportunities for participation, involvement, and fair treatment of individuals and groups in social, political, and economic activities; it is also considered as one of the Oromoo contributions to black civilizations (Damusee, 2011); this refers to its vitally inherent qualities to benefit modern political systems of the humanity. Though knowing the exact time and place for the origin of Gadaa is difficult, it had been evident in practice and function in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Haile, 2009; Jalata, 2012). It is likely to have evolved gradually through time being constituted, reconstituted, amended, and improved. Remarkable individuals and periods must have involved in the formulations and reformulations of the present forms and achievements, for which Gadaa is praised.

Interruption, revival, and renaissance are quite familiar in the historical development and evolving of Gadaa. Interruption indicates its exposure to deterioration and ceasing due to internal and external pressures; this is called *Gadaan jaatame*; it is about getting old and withering away. Revival is about its withstanding of difficult economic, social, and political circumstances or re-emerging after interval; this is *Gadaan ce'e/damdamate*. And

renaissance designates its reconstitutions and reorganizations in new form; this is *Gadaan haara'e/haarome*. The first external challenge, which some sources reveal for the disruption of Gadaa, was the expansion of Christian kingdom and Muslim Sultanates in Ethiopia and around Horn of Africa that led to the interruption of Gadaa (*cinna Gadaa*) from 756-1116 among some clans of the Oromoo. Although Gadaa leaders like Abbolea, Habroo, Cangaree Korboo, Harruu Maaruu and Namoo Dooyyoo attempted to strengthen Gadaa in 12<sup>th</sup> century. The prolonged Christian-Muslim conflicts (13-15<sup>th</sup> centuries) pushed the Oromoo below Awash River (Haile, 2009; Nigatu, 2012). However, beginning from the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century (1450), the Oromoo reformed their Gadaa (*haaromsa Gadaa*) by consolidating their military strength and fought 12 *Buttaa* wars from (1522-1608) to liberate their territories. The second challenge, both internal and external, to fall Gadaa apart began at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century. This included the formation of Oromoo Monarchies (*mootii*) and Menelik II's incorporation of Oromoo land through intensification of the wars of Christianity and Islam. Accordingly, Gadaa began to decline and gradually crumble in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hassen, 1999; Ta'a, 2002; Tesfaye, 2012). The 19<sup>th</sup> century presented the Oromoo with Menelik II's war that primarily targeted the Gadaa centres.

One of the centres to suffer the decline and crumble was Odaa Doggii, the centre of the Salgan Iluu of Macca. It is located in Iluu Abbaa Boor Zone in the south-western part of Oromiyaa State in the current Ethiopian administrative structure. The zone is surrounded by Gambela State in the west, and the South Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples State in the south. Zones of Oromiyaa State

surrounding Iluu Abbaa Boor Zone are Jimma Zone in the east and southeast, West Wallaga in the north and east Wallaga in northeast.

The correct name of the administrative zone is Iluu Abbaa Boor. Previously, it used to be perceived to have come from "Iluu" and "Abbaa Booraa,"<sup>2</sup>Iluu, being the name of the clan, and Abbaa Boor, their leader, Caalii Shoonoo. According to the Iluu Oromoo naming tradition, if the name of a person is Caalii, he would have the name of Abbaa Boor (the man of tomorrow). Such naming tradition is still common in this area. Abyssinian rulers had the custom and the tradition of changing names of places and peoples following their conquest. This was to distort origins and histories, to deny the right ownership of the indigenous Oromoo off their land. Their aims were to inflict wounds and damages and deny the subject population their true essences, histories, and identities. This has retained its scar on Gadaa and the ways of the lives of the Iluu Oromoo. So, this study noticed that the name Abbaa Booraa is distortion.

The Iluu Oromoo had been independent before the coming of the forces of Menelik II. Laaftoo Guyyee, Qilxuu Laaftoo, and Shoonoo Qilxuu were said to lead by Makkoo Bilii's Gadaa laws. Laaftoo

Guyyee transferred power to Qilxuu Laaftoo, so did he to Shoonoo Qilxuu following Gadaa traditions. Caalii Shoonoo (Abbaa Boor) (1820-1850), Diimaa Caalii (1851-1872), Garisaa Diimaa (1872-1875), and Fatansa Iluu (1876-1886) were Abbaa Bokkuus to keep their powers for forty years and transfer to their sons. Gadaa laws remained integral to their rules; informants stress leaders governed according to the laws of Gadaa; powers were distributed among all the clans; they were involved in fight against colonizers to defend their sovereignty. Garisaa Diimaa died fighting with Ras Tesema Nadew, Menelik's warlord. Fatansa Iluu (Abba Ayyaansoo) was a war leader who succeeded him to defend the country under invasion. He sacrificed bull to inaugurate. He defeated the forces of Tesema Nadew at "Qarsaa Googillaa" around 1875, which the Iluu still commemorate as historic symbol of patriotism. Unfortunately, the fierce resistance ended with subjugation in 1889. This forced the Iluu Gadaa to be more disrupted, fragmented, localized, and invisible.

The independent Gadaa practice had been disturbed internally. The leaders belonged to the same family, Laaftoo Guyyee lineage, even though we do not know about Fatansaa Iluu. Informants say power had always been maintained by Warra Hadheessoo even before the system became monarchical; it used to pass from father to son; but feeding Qumbii, blessing, law-making, oath-taking, and others remained its integral parts. However, Gadaa dictates father and son to be apart by forty (40) years. We can interpret that Illu Gadaa followed the bokkuu system, the characteristic of Macca Gadaa. The colonial power captured the Iluu angrily, exercised direct rule, and treated them cruelly. Ras Tesema abolished their Gadaa and dictated colonial rules differently from

<sup>2</sup> 'Iluu' refers to Salgan Iluu (the nine Iluu), name of a clan residing on the land. It comes from name of a person who begot nine children to overtake the land. Caalii Shoonoo (or **Abbaa Boor**) descended from Iluu to found Gadaa Centre. The area was named as *araddaa Makkoo Bilii, qabiyyee Laaftoo Guyyee* before the conquest of Menelik II, who conquered and changed its name into Iluu Abbaa Booraa to mystify the origin and dispossess from the natives, a characteristic of Abyssinian colonialism.

their neighbours in 'Jimma' and Wallaga, which surrendered relatively peacefully. The latter were allowed to self-administer, but pay taxes to Menelik to prove their loyalties.

The defeat at the battlefield exposed the Iluu Oromoo to barbaric colonial rule. Cruel, oppressive, and inhumane treatment and serfdom of Abyssinian colonialism degraded their human value. Gadaa tradition was instrumental to support resistance (Hassen, 1999; Jalata, 2009, 2013, 2014). The Oromoo have generally resisted the conquest, subjugation, cultural denigration, and distortion of their names, history, and identities. Even though they occupy wider areas across Ethiopia with limited communication channels, they fought relentlessly against the conquest. The Italian occupation paved the ways for the Iluu along their brothers in Wallaga and Jimma provinces to form the Western Oromoo Confederacy in 1936 (Gabissa, 2007). The struggle and fighting have developed their consciousness to require a search for identities. This consciousness has especially been developed after 1950. The liberation struggle reached its impetus, especially during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, supported by the development of intellectualism and political elitism (Bulcha, 1993; Hassen, 1999, 2000; Jalata, 2009, 2014, 2018; Kumsa, 2013).

It has envisioned, established, developed, and determined to realize its goals, domains, and narratives. This has to be founded on powerful principles to unite the Oromoo. The Oromoo national consciousness has reached the stage where it recognizes Gadaa as its emblem of struggle and its uniting force of the wider resistances. Gadaa had been bravely, continuously, and determinedly practiced among many Oromoo groups. It has values, principles, laws, rules, and regulations to

enforce truth and honest political practices. It is fair, honest, egalitarian, participatory, and understanding. It is more humane to respect and to care for. These give it momentum to call for revitalizations at the centres where it had been weakened to bring about and strengthening Oromoo unity (Hassen, 1999, 2000; Jalata, 2009, 2014).

Accordingly, different Gadaa centres have been revitalized. Odaa Doggii is one among these reviving Gadaa centres and it is one of the least studied. The revitalization proves its values and democratic principles; it negates the features the Abyssinian colonial scholars have attributed to Gadaa as backward, repulsive and worthless. Accordingly, UNESCO has inscribed it as Intangible World Heritage at its eleventh session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage held in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa). The inscription also proves the values inherent in Gadaa system; but calls upon the beholding nation to devise the means of sustaining the remarkable heritage.

Scholars in the field of Oromoo studies believe any attempt to study Oromoo culture and history needs to examine Gadaa system. In this regard, Hinew (2012) says, "The socio-economic, political and religious lives of the Oromoo were highly intertwined which would be incomplete without investigating the origin of Gadaa system." It is essential to any person who wants to study Oromoo culture to look into Gadaa system. Hence, different scholars from various disciplines have conducted research on Gadaa system and have produced a significant number of their studies. Yet, most of these are limited to exploring the social and the political aspects from within groups it continued to exist. The resistance to the subjugation of

Menelik's Imperial hegemony, having momentum after 1960s, has called for the reclaims and revivals of Gadaa. This subsequently helped the inscription of Gadaa into the list of UNESCO's world heritage of humanity.

However, literature is scanty on the challenges and prospects of Gadaa revival. Few attempts were made to understand the problems and the prospects of its revitalization. The costs of liberation struggle are huge; the inherent democratic values and principles in Gadaa are so strong to boost human dignity to call for its revival; it is desirable to support the manners intellectually and scientifically. This research has been conducted to fill the realized gap to answer some basic questions in relation to the issues of revitalizations. It aims to explore the major challenges, the activities the current leaders perform, and the future prospects of the revitalized Iлуу Gadaa. Therefore, this study explores and investigates thoroughly the challenges and prospects of Iлуу Gadaa revitalizations.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This is an ethnographic research that employed qualitative descriptive research design. Primary and secondary sources of data were used. The field works for primary data were conducted mainly in March – April 2017; others were conducted before and after this time to get first-hand information. Data were collected from the sample population using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used in the selections of individual participants from the community members; the samples paved ways to social and cultural realities and practices. First officers at Iлуу Abbaa Boor Zone Culture and Tourism Office were consulted. These helped in identifying

resourceful districts and specific localities. Accordingly, Mattuu, Yaayyoo, and Hurrumuu were selected purposively as resourceful Gadaa centres and practices of revitalization. Subsequently, the practicing Abbaa Gadaas, cultural experts, and other knowledgeable elders from the communities of these districts were identified and used as representatives of Salgan Iлуу on the subject of study. These helped to have access to adequate and authentic data, which the research is believed to have acquired.

Interviews were used as primary data collection in this study. Both structured and semi-structured interviews were employed. Key informants have been selected with the intention of acquiring adequate data required for this research. These interviews have been focused on historical circumstances leading to the weakening of Gadaa, the effects of the damages, the processes and experiences of revitalization.

Two focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted in this research. Eight individuals participated in the first FGD; and seven individuals involved in the second FGD. The participants were mainly Gadaa leaders and other members of the communities who have associations with the subject of study. The discussion points revolved around their experiences and perceptions about the weakening and revitalization processes, the problems faced, and the existing opportunities to help revitalizations. In this method, the participants were made to freely discuss with each other and with the moderator. The use of this method helped to crosscheck and triangulate the data.

Further, observation was used to enrich the data for this study. It focused on activities of Gadaa leaders to get their real life in Gadaa and the current status of the revived

Gadaa centre at Odaa Doggii. The observations focused on the ritual performances and their processes: the rituals of Gadaa, Irreessa Malkaa Soor, resolving conflicts, etc. They made us realize that Iluu Gadaa centre has been well promoted and conserved. Gadaa councils have resolved two cases and these provided opportunities to assess the cases and their manners of resolutions. The studies of the cases were aimed to identify performances, processes, and procedures of the contemporary Iluu Gadaa. It is also used to evaluate the significances of Gadaa system in resolving conflicts and settling social issues. Likewise, it was to distinguish the challenges in applying customary court resolution and its advantages over the use of the official government laws. Customary mechanisms of resolving conflicts were in practice in Iluu Gadaa. Secondary data of variable types and natures have also been used to develop this manuscript. These include, among others, pamphlets and seasonal publications of the Culture and Tourism Office of Iluu Abbaa Boor Zone and the districts under it, scholarly studies of other individuals and groups, unpublished studies, etc. They have been cross-checked with primary and other secondary sources before use. The secondary sources have significantly enriched the study. The data obtained through these different research methods and instruments identified above were transcribed, organized, analyzed, categorized, triangulated, translated, interpreted, and presented qualitatively. Finally, conclusions were drawn from the analysed and interpreted data. In general, the ethnographic data were analysed in line with the methods. We present the data and discuss about the findings and implications. The focuses are on the processes and challenges Iluu Gadaa revitalization faces internally and externally and the existing opportunities for its developments and

prosperity. Some of the challenges it is currently facing start the discussions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Challenges in Iluu Gadaa Revitalization

Iluu Gadaa faces a number of challenges. Some of these are external to Gadaa and are imposed upon it from alien cultures; historical processes and developments bring some burdens which were hitherto unknown, unfamiliar, and incongruent with Gadaa. Others are internal to the system; Gadaa is cyclical and spiral; it follows continuous processes and development patterns; Sirnaa Turaa informed us that learning, training and practicing are processional and life-long; rituals are required in proceeding to next stage; they consume resources and economic power; the laws and rules are reiterated, reconsidered, revised, and amended seriously and justifiably; some are strict though others are flexible. These could be difficult to fulfil and to fully attend in terms of economy and time in the today's life style. The observed challenges are multifaceted and presented in the subsequent sections

### Globalization, Modernity and/or Modern Education

Gadaa has been folkloric and knowledge system. It has been created, amended, invigorated, practiced, spread, and transmitted orally. Its knowledge and experiences are traditionally learned, acquired, shared, and enriched in oral traditions and in practical participations in the events, rituals, and activities. These are accessed through live events, physical presence, and participation. Membership is needed and acquired through such presence and for practical purposes. One carries out the activities it requires of individuals enjoys the rights it renders, and performs

the acts expected of him. In general, Gadaa rules, laws, acts, and obligations have been invented, learned, executed, and discharged in folklore forms until it has come to scientific investigations (Legesse, 1973; Jalata, 2014; Bidu, 2015).

Folklore and the production of folk cultural forms are tested and tempted in the faces of globalization and modernization. It is subdued and at times forced to cease, shrink, accommodate alien elements, be modified, and profusely or partly revitalized. It is exposed and can be intermittent. That is why Lau (1999) has the following to say, "*Because the study of folklore has been-and continues to be—organized around relationships of cultural production to local community, nationality, diaspora, ethnicity, identity, and power differentials, theories of globalization are fundamental to both the history and the future of the discipline.*"

In the same manner, Gadaa system faces challenges from the expansion of modern education. Oromoo parents send their children to towns in search of modern education. Children go away from home; they could not observe and participate in activities, daily rituals, and routines. They have little time to attend the oral traditions and the daily performances. It is a natural process that the parents get old and gradually die out with their immense and expansive knowledge and experiences accumulated through generations about the system. Therefore, the latter disappears or dies out with them in the orality.

On the contrary, the expanded modern education has little to do with the folkloric nature of Gadaa system. Modern Ethiopian and African education are in general ill-

conceived and colonial in nature (Negash, 2006). Instead of exploring and exploiting local cultures and traditions to promote the skills and enrich the minds of the children with meaningful lessons and learning activities, it stresses the acquisitions of foreign languages. Afaan Oromoo has been oral until very recently; the Oromoo tradition has been among the most marginalized, discriminated, and discouraged. In translating de Salviac's (1901) book, Keno (2005) says Ethiopian education system intends to deconstruct Oromoo culture and identity. Indeed, the Ethiopianists themselves severely criticize Ethiopian education system for abnegating Ethiopian tradition in general including the Ge'ez church school system. In this regard, Woldeyes (2017) has the following to say to show the severity level of the issue:

Since the late 19th century, Ethiopia simply duplicated western education to modernize without due consideration of the importance of traditional learning. Some, including myself, have at times expressed concerns regarding the indiscriminate adoption of modern western education in Ethiopia. What some call modernization has come at the cost of a total neglect of traditional learning or, the lack of balance in incorporating traditional humanistic Ethiopian teachings and the important and valuable aspects of western scientific education.

Ethiopia could not forge and mold its education policy and curriculum. Even

though it claims it has never been colonized and considered itself as the only

African country to have defended itself from the subjugation of Italian colonial power, it failed to delivery this truly by deterring psychological enslavement. Woldeyes (2017) continues to denounce the idea that “...Ethiopians feel proud of their history, but ... they look down upon their traditional cultures and values. “It is ‘centrelessness’, a form of alienation where one feels isolated from their tradition but is not granted a place in the new western system.”

Ethiopian education system ignores the traditional wisdoms of its peoples. It rather creates a traditional primary mental dichotomy as science vs. tradition to show the contrast between the two. Here, science refers to the modern western knowledge system in written form, which Ethiopian education policy considers as true knowledge and education worth learning. Tradition is oral and considered as beliefs emanated from naivety, ignorance, and backwardness; so are the sources. They have no scientific bases and are not education worth learning.

Ethiopian curriculum undermines and ridicules these knowledge, experiences, and skills that are in orality and emanate from them as irrelevant to future life (Negash, 2006; Ficquet and Feyissa, 2015). The life the children lead and the subject matters they learn at schools have little in common. Parents, teachers, and school administrators play limited roles in planning and curriculum development. The visible disparity produces such erroneous perceptions as has been reflected in the saying, “*Saayinsiin qormaata darbuuf*” (science is to pass exams). In other words, it means science is irrelevant for or inapplicable to life. Children go to school to pass exams and count grades. The content of education reflects the interests of its sponsors: donors and the World Bank (Negash, 2006). But

still it takes most of their time. They invest the time which they could devote for learning the ways of actual life. The latter provides a lot to teach practical life experiences. The informants quietly and consistently complain about the missing of their culture and values in their children’s education. As per the information from Abbaa Gadaa Taakkalaa Dhinsaa “*Ijoolleen keenyaa aadaa keenya barataa hin jirtu; isheen waan ormaa barataa, eenyu Gadaa keenya nurraa fuudha? Kana iyyaa jirra (Our children are not learning our culture; while they are learning alien things, who will overtake our Gadaa? We are decrying this)*”. *Gadaa* system is the hub of Oromoo tradition or culture. It overrules all aspects of Oromoo life including the rules, the laws, the belief systems, the social relations and networks, the day-to-day activities, creativities, and artistic performances. It reflects their environment, vegetation, plants, animals, landscapes, weather conditions, etc. These are what the informant is referring to. Curriculum developers and planners have considered the same as naïve, backward, and irrelevant knowledge to be ignored. Young minds are shaped in this ideology and are distanced from Gadaa.

The elders wane out gradually with their substantial knowledge of Gadaa system, to which the youth remain ignorant. The circumstances have substantially affected the existence of *Gadaa* system and its reviving potentials. As a result, the cultural value systems wherein the identity of the Oromoo has been rooted could be affected. Oromoo children have been unwillingly forced to learn alien cultures. Only recently are certain elements of Oromoo culture start to be integrated in students’ textbook. Here, Oromoo children are losing their culture due to the influence of globalization, which carries western culture, and the influence of Abyssinian



culture, which degrades *Oromummaa*. The former has introduced products of modern technology (TV, CD, DVD, Cell Phone, etc.) that helps to bring home products of the western culture. The young are under the influence of western culture which has alienated them from their traditional culture and in which their real identity is hidden. The dominance of Abyssinian culture has denied Oromummaa in curriculum and national media outlets. As Taakkalaa Dhinsaa (informant) informed us in the interview in the above quotation, the situation threatens the effective revitalization of Gadaa system unless the mechanism of incorporating it in curriculum is devised.

### Colonial Legacy

Until recently, Oromoo culture had been hidden from the national stages of cultural show in Ethiopia. Sirnaa Turaa informed us that “*Taabotaa fi wattaaddaratu aadaa nu gachisiise* (the church and the soldiers forced us to abandon our culture).” The two anti-Oromoo institutions had been instrumental to suppress, undermine, discourage, and replace Oromoo culture by the metamorphosed ‘Habesha’ culture. This is the characteristic of Ethiopian colonialism as the following quotation also confirms:

[The] territorial organization favored the church and the army as vectors of social mobility, and contributed to the mixing of populations. Having a written culture had been instrumental in the circulation and diffusion of ideas on a wide scale. The expansionist aims of the Christian kingdom were supported by a religious ideology in which Ethiopian Christians took over the role

of the chosen people. This justified the subjugation, exploitation and enslavement of peripheral non-Christian societies, who themselves gradually assimilated elements of the Habesha ethos. When this regional African power was challenged by the expansionism of colonial Christian powers, the Habesha clerical and political elite redefined the mold of Ethiopian culture by adapting it to the new foreign standards. This process of unification, recodification and standardization of a modern national culture that was linked with urban centers was done at the expense of popular cultures and subaltern ethnicities (Ficquet and Feyissa, 2015).

In Iлуу Abbaa Boor, Qaalluu institution was abandoned as a result. As the informants Sirnaa Turaa and Tamasgeen Korjee identified formerly, three well known Iлуу Qaalluus were Qaalluu Abbaa caffee, Qaalluu Maallimoo Suuttaa and Qaalluu Aseello Bongaa. These had been vanished around 1942 by proclamation of His Highness Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie. Their disappearance had great impact on Gadaa system. This was due to the Abyssinian colonialism on the Oromoo land.

Abyssinian Colonialism imposed its rules, laws, systems and values upon its subjects. Oromoo and other peoples’ children used to learn the knowledge accepted by the colonial masters. The policy highly encourages cultural assimilations. Children also learn to embrace and promote the

colonial values and to undermine and put off their people's traditions. *Gadaa* system and the values enshrined in it had been considered grotesque. Informants expressed that elders watched the effects of colonial education on their sons and daughters to comment, "*ilmoo eenyuu eenyuu, tamaartee galte jennaan edaa maraattee galtee (the offspring of so and so, we thought you learned and came home; but you became mad and came home!)*." This is because they have witnessed they undermined and deviated from the norm and social ethos and undermined the social and cultural values enshrined in *Gadaa* tradition. The society considers this as curse. The individuals undermine the culture, the tradition, the rules, laws, and the values which comforted and reared them to live and grow to the level of prosperity. For the so called educated, the act is considered the sign of civilization. But for the society, it is considered maverick, the sign of madness.

The colonialism distorts the self-perception of the subject people and undermines their culture and identities. Subsequently, the young generation gives their back to such cultures and identities to learn those of the colonial masters. *Gadaa* demands the young generation to learn its laws, values, principles, and practices right from the early age. Leaders are elected from within them; those who exhibit strong and convincing potentials through this continuous learning, education, development, and cultural analyses are more viable. They undergo these processually to become leaders as other important criteria. In groups where *Gadaa* has continuously survived, these are practical and part of the human development process. Quite interestingly children learn their identities and structural patterns in the *Gadaa* system right from birth. What they do today also determines

their opportunities to become future leaders (Bidu, 2015). Such continuity is lacking in Iluu *Gadaa* as informants Asfawuu Aagaa and Tasammaa Kabbadaa informed the researchers. The absence of continued efforts to learn, remember, use and live the folk wisdom has affected the minds of the young and their capacities to process and use knowledge and skills in practical terms.

This knowledge gap undermines *Gadaa* system. In the case of abolished and newly revitalized *Gadaa* centres, the values, traditions, and procedures of undertaking cultural norms are not well known to be followed. For example, anyone would take up the *horooroo*, wear the clothes, and aspire to be an *Abbaa Gadaa*. The specific criteria and the required procedures to undergo have been forgotten, undermined or not considered relevant. Individuals could be assigned to *Gadaa* leadership by political elites. Earlier being an elder, being from a first married mother (*ilma niitii qarree*), wisdom (skills and knowledge), physical fitness, etc. used to be required to rear to *Gadaa* leadership (Legesse, 1973; Bidu, 2015). At least one has to fulfil some of the criteria and reared into others to become *Abbaa Gadaa*. Today, as informed from Imaam Abduu, the knowledge gaps either undermined *Gadaa* values or it has been used as pretext to promote the self-interests of some individuals or institutions.

### **The Current Government System**

The current government system affects *Gadaa* revitalization in a number of ways. It inherits its structures from the colonial legacies. It imposes this on *Gadaa*. As has been aforesaid, traditionally Salgan Iluu *Gadaa* had 56 seats (*teessoo*); however, in *Gadaa* revitalization process the seats are reduced to 48. The number is derived from the districts in Iluu *Abbaa Boor* Zone in the current administration. From the 22 districts and two city administrations

(Mattuu and Beddellee<sup>3</sup>) in this zone, two persons have been selected to assemble representing their respective districts. These encompass 48 seats. Informants Asfawuu Aagaa and Chernet Beyene complained that the districts were categorized depending on physical proximities of the land; they ignored the appropriate genealogical structure, which Gadaa used to follow; even some genealogical lines could be divided and left without representations. Besides, the Culture and Tourism Offices of the districts supported and sponsored Gadaa revitalization. Thus, their roles and interests were visibly reflected. But Gadaa used to structure and organize the society in lineage and family lines. One is primarily accounted to his/her clan. Representations are also lineal. Informants Xabboo Qoree and Qilxuu Goree<sup>4</sup> severely criticized the government system to ignore and undermine the roles and influences of family and lineage lines and its taking the roles over for itself in revitalizing Gadaa.

In addition to these impacts, government officials also try to make Gadaa leaders their apparatus for political propaganda. The government body needs to be acknowledged by the society. In Gadaa revitalization processes at Odaa Doggii in 2015, writings and announcements were made to promote government. This indicates Gadaa system operates by the goodwill of the government on power. This greatly undermines the objectives, principles, values, and laws of Gadaa; it hampers the rationality and originality of

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<sup>3</sup>Presently the city is the centre of Bunnoo Beddellee Zone, recently separated from Iluu Abbaa Boor Zone. This continuous change and dynamism is a challenge to reinstitute Gadaa structure in likewise manners.

<sup>4</sup>Ethical issues enforce the use of pseudo names for the safety of informants.

Gadaa system, which is bound by strict and strong values for neutrality. Truth is by no mean negotiated in Gadaa rules and laws. It is its dogma. Using the knowledge gap discussed above, the government system's enforcing such aims undermines the true essence of Gadaa system in some cases. As we were informed by Itichaa Wayyeessaa and Soorii Buubaa this was serious distortion and damaging to Gadaa system.

### **Budget and Galmaa (Assembly Hall)**

Gadaa is naturally demanding and the leaders are expected to be more than self-sufficient economically. The rituals must be abundant and exhibit the properties of the leaders, the society, and the Gadaa. In Gadaa system, abundance and prosperities are required and leaders speak of their Gadaa proudly in terms of these criteria. In Oromoo culture, as Dinqee Gaarii, Urgee Roobaa and Sulemaan Abdiisaa informed us, necessary materials were provided by the people, Gadaa members and the rest are financed by the leaders themselves. The provided items include food, drinks, cattle and cash. These make Gadaa self-sufficient.

Now the Iluu Gadaa has neither any budget nor enjoys the traditional supports and provisions of the people as independent institution. The traditions of people to help Gadaa as traditionally learned have been dismantled. The traditional abundance has vanished. The prosperous life the Iluu Oromoo used to enjoy is no more in place. The different forms of government have sent them to destitute. They pay tax to the government. The traditions and structures through which Gadaa used to receive such supports and provisions have been dismantled. The *Abbaa Gadaas* expect budget and allowances for everything from government bodies to execute rituals and any Gadaa activities. This diminishes the power of Gadaa and undermines its

independence and neutrality. The government bodies verbally make promises to strengthen Gadaa. Among other things, they promise building huge hall (*Galma*) for Gadaa assemblies instead of sitting under Odaa (sycamore) tree and give its ritual centres for investment. Truly the promise is not realized. In addition to the lack of the hall, a number of other problems have been unforeseen. Odaa (sycamore) trees function as ritual centres and are considered sacred places of truth and honesty. The Oromoo have great respect for Odaa. They feel the sacredness in mind under Odaa tree and this eases the challenges in detecting and testifying truth. In halls, however, such powers and feelings are not sensed and feared; the respect for Odaa and hall are quite different. Thus, it is improper to build hall in the place of Odaa.

#### **The Gap of Gadaa Knowledge**

Gadaa has been interrupted for more than 130 years from Salgan Iluu. The informants confirm that about three or more generations have passed since the collapse of Gadaa leadership. The current generation lack experiences to organize in. Gadaa, learn its laws and rules, go through its ritual processes and performances, and fulfill its requirements. These issues have accumulated vast and expansive knowledge to demand extended time and practical skills and performances to master. Informant Imaam Abduu questioned the reasons and justifications for these generations to acquire such knowledge. Government bodies have been discouraging Gadaa in any possible means. Few external purposes and motives enforce such knowledge and practices. Knowledgeable persons are not encouraged to come to Gadaa leadership; nor are conditions facilitated for them; they have limited chances to be. The call for revitalizing it comes out of such circumstances. The problem begins with selecting the right

person to the right position: who should lead Gadaa? Who should pioneer in its revitalizations? What kind of knowledge has he maintained or preserved? How far is he determined or dedicated to realize revitalizations? These questions are difficult to answer.

It is difficult to deliver, reinvigorate and relive the knowledge of Gadaa in a short period of time. It can take long time as the current Iluu have no practical experiences of it. They have lost their Gadaa grades and classes. In this area, knowledge of Gadaa is not descended or preceded from father to the son. As has been realized from the fieldwork, during the revitalization time, Gadaa leaders were elected only from adults. These members are not equipped with knowledge of the rules, laws, principles, and values. They have never learned from preceding Gadaa grades. It is difficult for them to reconstruct these to enrich young minds with. So, they have to rear children in Gadaa rather than electing elders who are dying members of the society. Therefore, this is a great obstacle for the sustainability of the system.

#### **Modern Religions (Christianity and Islam)**

Globalization is considered as if it were the phenomenon of the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it began with the disseminations of modern religions, like Christianity and Islam. Confirming this, Lau (1999) says "*Religious movements – particularly Christianity and Islam-provide some of the earliest examples of globalization.*" These religions are highly systematic and resourceful in their efforts to severely damage local traditions, belief systems, attitudes, and social structures of many cultures from around the world. However, it has been proved that they faced difficulties to completely destroy the local religious beliefs and practices as they wish.

Acquah (2011) clearly discusses this from his study in Ghana:

“The religious beliefs, practices and the provision of social services of these immigrant religions have impacted on the religious and cultural life of the traditional communities. Yet, the indigenous religious beliefs and cultural values have served not only as the mediation of expressions for both indigenous Christians and Muslims in this area; they have, also, shaped, to a great extent, the forms of Christianity and Islam that developed as well as the relationships between members of the diverse religious groups.”

The local and global religions have their own respective indispensable values and belief systems. These become points of departure and contradictions in many cases; so are they, too, in Iluu Gadaa. Orthodox Christianity and Islam have been influencing the local community to abandon their indigenous religion for so long. They have their own contentious issues to ignite animosity between themselves even if there is limited variability in their principles and interests to degrade Gadaa and the accompanying belief system. Recently Protestantism has also been added to these. Mirreessaa Ga'iisaa informed us that their strong contradictions surface during rituals and ceremonies. Sometimes the local religion and culture demand slaughters and other different types of cultural performances. Christianity and Islam strongly oppose these practices and performances.

In Oromoo, in general, and Salgan Iluu (at Odaa Doggii), in particular, Christianity and Islam are formal religions and have formal systems to support, sponsor, and empower. They have financial capacities

and backings. They are meticulously and purposefully empowered to brainwash and mastermind individuals and groups against *Gadaa*, its values, requirements, and way of life. Some informants informed us that they open direct psychological warfare against *Gadaa* and the belief systems and practices it requires. They brand it ungodly. They criticize it for being against the teachings of the Bible and the Quran. They condemn it as being sinful and ridicule it. These have powerful and strong influences to undermine *Gadaa* system and its practical performances. Even those who are determined to pursue *Gadaa* sometimes face dilemmas. This is especially true when they face difficulties from multiple perspectives and challenges.

The two religious doctrines closely examine, investigate, and destroy the bases and structures of the local indigenous traditions. They apply psychological warfare on the people and weaken their traditions. Gadaa system has suffered a lot and weakened strongly due to these major factors. Both Christian and Muslim religions had contributed in weakening Iluu Gadaa. Many informants confirmed that the religious leaders have no interest for the revitalization of Iluu Gadaa in fear of their followers retreat to Gadaa and *waaqeffannaa*. However, most of Iluu Gadaa leaders are followers of Islamic religion. But they participate in Gadaa activities. This implies that the peoples are keen in their traditions. Orthodox was introduced to Iluu Abbaa Boor as the result of Menelik's conquest of 1889. It overtook Iluu Oromoo worshipping centres like the *ardaa jilaas* and constructed Orthodox Church upon them. Due to the support it used to enjoy from the past regimes it could develop at the expense of the Iluu *Gadaa*. But the anger and hatred this provoked in the people forced them to embrace Islam.

A number of informants (like Tasfaayee Lamuu, Jigsaa Kuusaa, and Alamuu Kabbadaa) have disclosed that even those who adopted it earlier have been retreating from Orthodox Christianity and embracing Protestantism. Nowadays, it is observable that this becomes the most powerful religion weakening Iluu Gadaa in its turn. However, Protestant church is allowing the members to sing songs by holding grass, siiqqee, Bokkuu, caaccuu and any Oromoo material culture. They also exploit the rhythmic patterns and dancing style of Oromoo folk culture, even though they consider some Gadaa practices as sin. Some followers of protestant are reluctant to participate in Gadaa activities. So these religions have great impact on Iluu Gadaa revitalization process.

#### **Prospect of revitalizing Iluu Gadaa**

A number of opportunities encourage and support the revitalization of Iluu Gadaa in spite of the challenges. It can be realized that the Oromoo are generally so curious, enthusiastic and overwhelmed about learning, understanding and rediscovering their identities and lost culture. They so repent for their prior ignorance and determined to recover them. The revivals of Gadaa at Odaa Doggii and Irreecha Malkaa Soor help the Iluu Oromoo to know more about their culture and identity. These pave more ways to interact with other Oromoo groups. The more they interact, the more they get courage. The more they know, the more they become curious and enthusiastic to learn further and preserve them. The Culture and Tourism Office of

Iluu Abbaa Boor Zone also discharges its responsibilities; the elected Gadaa leaders are teaching the people about Gadaa.

Different concerned bodies are working seriously and determinedly realizing the enthusiasm and powers of the Iluu Oromoo in general. The researchers have observed when Gadaa leaders were discussing with the people on the future of Iluu Gadaa. The leaders are now solving different social issues at Gadaa assemblies. In other words, Gadaa is already solving the problems of the society. The construction of Galma *abbootii Gadaa* was also proposed. Different institutions are making promises to support Iluu Gadaa. For example, Mettu University has allocated fund for the construction of road to Odaa Doggii, the centre of Iluu Gadaa assembly.

Overall, Gadaa is now inscribed by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage of the humanity in 2016. In this case, Iluu Gadaa has played a great role since it is considered as active Gadaa. For example, the Haadha Siiqqee (portrayed in the figure below holding her Siiqqee staff on her right and okolee on her left hands) (Fig 1) that led the women crew on the stage of inscription was from Iluu Gadaa. This signifies its contributions on the national stage to add the encouragement of the group and boost their morales underscoring the significance of this particular Gadaa. It demonstrates their roles and encourages them to add more functions to promote and preserve Gadaa and contributions to the society



**Fig. 1.** Haadha Siiqqee from Iluu Oromoo holding siiqqee on right and okolee on left hands.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study is conducted on the challenges and prospects in revitalization of Gadaa in general and Iluu Gadaa in particular. The study comes up with some concepts concerning Iluu Gadaa; the Iluu Gadaa revitalization process, challenges in revitalization, change and continuity in the process and its prospects are clearly stated using the data gathered from the field. First, this finding shows that revitalizing Iluu Gadaa had a lot of challenges. Among others globalization and modernity or

modern education, colonial legacy, government system, shortage of income, knowledge gap about Gadaa and impacts of modern religions (Christianity and Islam) have been identified. These incur challenges and put Iluu Gadaa in tempting situations. They may cause frustrations. Contrarily, Iluu Gadaa has a number of promising opportunities. Iluu Abbaa Boor Zone Culture and Tourism Office is working hard to relive by different mechanisms. Giving awareness to the public is the major task of the officers.

They are also constructing road and *galma* at Odaa Doggii and studying Iluu Gadaa. Though some doubts are unavoidable, the Iluu are generally enthusiastic and curious to rediscover and learn about their culture and identity. Gadaa leaders are keen to use their powers to alleviate social problems, other institutions (like Mettu University) are ready to support, Gadaa is inscribed in UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage of humanity, Haadha Siiqqee from Iluu represents the siiqqee institution to inspire the Iluu positively, etc. These are among noble prospects of the system. Over all, Iluu Gadaa system is being revitalized since 2015; it is on good move (beginning). However, it is essential to preserve its originality, authenticity, creativity, fairness, justices, democratic values and principles. Especially, recording Gadaa laws, rules, and values, principles from where it has been stronger, more intact and still in practices is mandatory. Higher learning institutions and their experts have to work with Gadaa leadership and the Iluu to actualize the needs and efforts. The government institutions should also show dedication and honest determinations to realize Gadaa for its own sake; not for their political propaganda.

Gadaa system is being revitalized in some parts of Oromiyaa. However, the finding of this research indicates the ways of revitalizations of Iluu Gadaa has problems to call for attentions of different bodies. Gadaa has enriched Oromoo culture and cultural heritage. Its vital aspects are in its values, principles, laws, and rules. We need to discern these to revitalize it. When we plan for its revitalization, we have to focus on this and try to make them practical. It is relevant to start at home/national level before (i.e. cultural nationalization before cultural globalization). Gadaa system is

UNESCO-inscribed to consider it as cultural globalization. However, still it is not well known and practiced in some parts of Ethiopia, even across all Oromoo land. Some of these cultural aspects are waning due to western cultural influences. This demands devising strategies to promote Gadaa and address the realized shortcomings. It needs to revitalize and upload in the remaining parts from the groups wherein the culture is alive and practical to those who know little about the ways and performances. Thus, commitments are required of the Iluu or the Oromoo in general and their leaders, the government officials, bureaucrats, and institutions.

Gadaa leaders should play their primary roles. They have to pioneer. Even though we see them taking initiatives and playing major roles to preserve and promote Gadaa system and Oromoo culture in many cases and places, some remain dormant to respond to calls of government institutions. The latter could be due to lack of knowledge, information about the earlier Abbaa Gadaas and Gadaa law-makers. Leaders are expected to be informed and courageous to take initiatives. They have to feel responsible and think critically and creatively to devise ways, mobilize the people, and realize the objectives of Gadaa revitalizations. Gadaa leaders need to be theoretically equipped and practically sharpened. They have to know what they should do and how they have to do. They have to force government bodies and public institutions to facilitate works on Gadaa research, education, and promotion. Abbaa Gadaas must be wise enough to be able to do these. The Abbaa Gadaas have to work persistently on this to make their Gadaa independent instead of making it depend on government bodies.



The people must understand that the issue of Gadaa is about identity. They are responsible to preserve, promote, and sustain their identities. They have to properly discharge their responsibilities to maintain and promote their culture. They can mobilize themselves to finance their institution, Gadaa system, the core of their values. The people devise their own traditional ways and mobilize their structures and resources to *buusaa gonofaa* (help and support needy individuals), *eela baasuu* (extract well water), *riqicha ijaaruu* (building the bridge), etc. They mobilize their resources, finance and help activities and needy people, and support the existence of Gadaa to keep it functioning. This is an opportunity for resolving communal problems and getting organized to think critically instead of waiting for helps and supports from other parts. It is also one way of self-empowerment. By doing this, the Abbaa Gadaas are also promoting their roles and national consciousness.

Through such actions, activities, and interactions; the people acquire more and more knowledge to distinguish their values and mechanisms from the alien system. Odaas are natural tree. They are taken as natural provisions and are considered to have come off Waaqa. But halls constructed from dry woods, tin, nail, brick, etc. do not bear the values eternal to the natural trees. Gadaa is the unifying force of the nation. The Oromoo have to make informed choices from the two taking the whole issues into account. They have to learn to be self-sufficient to devise their own ways to maintain their traditions. They have to be conscious enough to know critically the values enshrined in Gadaa system. It is also familiar to their environment, traditions, and ways of life to provide practical and resourceful system to alleviate their social, political, economic,

and ideological problems. It gives alternative option to make them free off government bureaucracies. But they have to learn to make it independent of the bureaucracies themselves. In these ways, the future of Gadaa system seems to be bright.

It is recommendable that the cultural values and the ways of life Gadaa promotes are better harnessed in the modern education system. This has multiple advantages. First, it helps to sustain the tradition and traditional values. Gadaa system is UNESCO inscribed as world heritage of humanity. UNESCO requires a means of sustaining this valuable heritage. Devising a means to incorporate Gadaa system in education helps to fulfil this requirement. Secondly, the school children learn important values, principles, and traditions which help them build and maintain fair, participatory, and egalitarian system relevance to their lives and know their identities. Third, pedagogically it becomes easier for children to learn, realize and use to solve practical daily problems. They connect school system and practical life. Positive outcomes can be driven from this in different ways. These can maintain traditions and identities, and devise means to learn better to improve future life. Teaching and learning become improved. Students learn from different aspects of life: from classroom lessons, practical daily life, parents and family members, the community at large, and even their dreams and exercises. From this, Gadaa system can drive opportunities of reviving and revitalizing.

Gadaa system provides alternative opportunities and solutions to social, administrative, and political problems and issues. It helps the society to have choice in trying to alleviate its problems. It also

supports the government to reduce Court, etc.). This helps to democratize the system and pluralize the ways of rendering better governing and administrative services to the citizens.

In this, the independence of Gadaa has to remain non-negotiable. It has to be independent and stick to its original values, rules, laws, and principles. The government must understand Gadaa has to exist for the sake of serving the people from another perspective. It is neither for utility of nor subordinating the government bodies and systems. It is needed to serve the people to get legal and administrative pluralism and to maintain their identities. Above all, Gadaa has to serve to make intact Oromoo values, identities, social and political structures, etc. These make the place and roles of Gadaa appealing and demanding. It calls for the recognizing Gadaa system and its uses in public administrations. Different institutions have to support and engage

pressures from its bureaucrats (police, further research on Gadaa system and ways of its promotion. Experts on Gadaa system in the universities, Oromiyaa Education Bureau, Oromiyaa Culture and Tourism Bureau, Oromiyaa Government Communication Bureau, professional Associations, NGOs, and other concerned bodies must coordinate their efforts to work together to make Gadaa practical, sustainable, known, and promoted. This way, we can boost the leverage the significance of Gadaa nationally and internationally.

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